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Safe and Healthy Lives in Safe and Healthy Communities

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Health-Risk Behaviors Improve Among RI Youth, 1997-2003 Health and Education Departments Release Trend Results

The Rhode Island Departments of Health (HEALTH) and Education (RIDE) released preliminary results today from the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). The YRBS monitors health-risk behaviors that contribute to death, disease, injury and other health problems among RI youth. Overall, 1,814 randomly selected public high school students (grades 9 through 12), a representative state sample, responded to the survey in the spring of 2003. By comparing the 2003 results with those from the 1997 and 2001 surveys, state and local officials can monitor trends in the health-risk behaviors of RI youth.

"Tracking changes in health-related behaviors over time helps us evaluate program performance and focus efforts on adolescents with greater risk," said Patricia A. Nolan, MD, MPH, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health. "The 2003 Survey shows that Rhode Island youth significantly reduced risky behaviors in 12 key areas since 1997." (See attached table) "The efforts of schools, communities and public health agencies are really paying off. We still have a lot more to do to promote healthy and safe behaviors among Rhode Island youth!"

The preliminary report presents 38 different indicators of behavioral health risks among RI adolescents including injury and violence, tobacco use, alcohol and drug use, sexual behavior, weight management and diet and physical activity. Twelve (12) key health behaviors showed significant improvement over time. In all but one instance (smoked one day in past month on school property), RI adolescents also performed above the national average. Only three areas (HIV/AIDS education, moderate physical exercise, and milk consumption) showed a negative trend with no significant change in 23 other indicators.

"I'm glad to see that Rhode Island youth are above the national average in many of these health indicators, but we still have our work cut out for us," said Peter McWalters, R.I. Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. "Schools are well positioned to help students learn about health issues and to support their making healthy choices. Through programs such as Healthy Schools! Healthy Kids!, Child Opportunity Zones, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers, we can provide a safe, healthy, and nurturing school environment."

The 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey was sponsored by the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 50 states, territories and municipalities nationwide. School-level information about health-risk behaviors is published under "School Climate" at www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu.

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Youth Health Risk Behaviors Displaying Improving Statewide Trends* Rhode Island YRBS, 1997-2003 vs. United States YRBS, 2003				
Risk Behaviors	Percentage of Public High School Students			
	RI			US 2003
	1997	2001	2003	
In past month, rode in a vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol.	35.9	32.3	28.2	30.2
Never or rarely wear a seatbelt when riding in a car.	32.7	17.9	15.6	18.2
Were in a physical fight in past year.	35.2	31.4	27.6	33.0
Carried a weapon (gun, knife, or club) in past month.	17.7	11.3	12.3	17.1
Smoked cigarettes on at least one day in the past month.	35.4	24.8	19.3	21.9
Used any tobacco (cigarettes, smokeless, or cigars) on at least one day in the past month.	No Data	29.2	23.4	27.5
Drank alcohol on at least one day in the past month.	52.2	50.3	44.5	44.9
Used inhalants (glue, aerosol or other sprays, paint) to get high one or more times during their life.	20.7	11.8	9.6	12.1
Among students having sexual intercourse in the past 3 months, those that did not use a condom during last sexual intercourse.	47.6	43.9	37.0	37.0
Vomited or took laxatives to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight in the past month.	6.1	4.7	4.1	6.0
Smoked cigarettes on at least one day in the past month on school property.	20.4	14.0	9.1	8.0
Among students currently enrolled in physical education, those that exercised or played sports for 20 minutes or less in an average class.	33.2	22.2	16.9	19.7

Youth Health Risk Behaviors Displaying Worsening Statewide Trends* Rhode Island YRBS, 1997-2003 vs. United States YRBS, 2003				
Risk Behaviors	Percentage of Public High School Students			
	RI			US 2003
	1997	2001	2003	
Did not drink three or more glasses of milk per day in the past week.	No Data	76.9	80.7	82.9
Had insufficient moderate physical activity in the past week**	No Data	70.8	77.7	75.3
Are unsure about being taught or had never been taught about AIDS and HIV infection in school.	5.0	9.6	8.4	12.1

* Statistically significant

** **Moderate physical exercise** – participate in activities that do not make you sweat and breathe hard for at least 30 minutes on 5 or more days in the past week.